

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 231627Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7486
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS UK
SUBJECT: MURDER AND KIDNAPPING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: BELFAST 110

CONGEN BELFAST DRAFTED THIS MESSAGE JUNE 20.

SUMMARY: THE PROVISIONAL IRAS JUNE 17 KILLING OF ONE
POLICEMAN, THE WOUNDING, APPARENT ABDUCTION AND KILLING
OF THE POLICEMAN'S COMPANION, AND THE 12-HOUR ABDUCTION
OF A CATHOLIC PRIEST AS HOSTAGE MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS
BIZARRE WERE IT NOT SO TRAGIC. THE EVENTS ARE STILL
OBSCURE AND MAY NEVER BE CLARIFIED. CLEARLY PIRA HAS
INTENSIFIED ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SECURITY FORCES,
BUT WE DOUBT IT HAS DECIDED TO START KIDNAPPING AS A
REGULAR TACTIC. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MEDIA HAVE AMPLY COVERED THE PIRA SHOOTING
JUNE 17 OF TWO POLICEMEN LURED INTO AN AMBUSH IN SOUTH
ARMAGH. THE AREA IS A FEW MILES FROM THE SOUTHERN
BORDER AND HAS PROVED DIFFICULT TO PACIFY. ONE POLICE-
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MAN WAS KILLED OUTRIGHT. THE POLICE BELIEVE THE OTHER
WAS SERIOUSLY WOUNDED WHEN HE WAS TAKEN AWAY BY PIRA,
AND MAY HAVE DIED FROM HIS WOUNDS. THE PROVISIONALS
INITIALLY ANNOUNCED HE HAD BEEN TAKEN FOR QUESTIONING,
THEN YESTERDAY (JUNE 19) THAT THEY HAD KILLED HIM. AN
INTENSIVE SEARCH IS ON FOR THE KILLERS AND THE BODY.
THE FORMER MAY BE EASIER TO FIND THAN THE LATTER, AND

ALL COULD BE OVER THE OPEN BORDER.

2. IN A TIT-FOR-TAT ACTION, UNKNOWN MEN ABDUCTED CATHOLIC PRIEST HUGH MURPHY JUNE 18. MESSAGES PURPORT-EDLY FROM THE ULSTER FREEDOM FIGHTERS (AN EXTREMIST OFFSHOOT OF THE EXTREME LOYALIST PARAMILITARY GROUP, ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE) SAID THE PRIEST WOULD BE HELD AS HOSTAGE AND SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS THE KIDNAPPED CONSTABLE. BUT THE MEN RELEASED FATHER MURPHY AFTER 12 HOURS OF UNCOMFORTABLE BUT COURTEOUS CAPTIVITY. THE UFF SAID THEY HAD NOT BEEN RESPONSIBLE AND THREATENED DEATH TO THOSE WHO HAD TAKEN THEIR NAME IN VAIN.

3. PUBLIC INDIGNATION IS HIGH. THE CATHOLIC AND CHURCH OF IRELAND PRIMATES MADE STRONG STATEMENTS, AND REV. IAN PAISLEY APPEALED FOR FATHER MURPHY'S RELEASE. IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, SEVERAL OTHER PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED OR SUFFERED TIT-FOR-TAT ATTEMPTS THESE DAYS, AND THERE HAS BEEN SOME STREET VIOLENCE.

4. COMMENT: THE POLICE BELIEVE THAT PIRA RESTRICTED ITS ACTIVITY UNTIL THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT WAS PUBLISHED LAST WEEK, AND THEN SHARPENED THEIR CAMPAIGN. SO MANY KILLING ATTEMPTS BARELY FAIL THAT WE SOMETIMES ARE TEMPTED TO THINK PIRA DELIBERATELY OR SUBCONSCIOUSLY MISSES. THIS ATTACK ON THE POLICEMEN WAS COLD BLOODEDLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DELIBERATE. SENIOR POLICE OFFICIALS RECENTLY HAVE BEEN

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GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC IN THEIR COMMENTS TO US, BUT THEY
ALLOW FOR SUCH CONTINUING OUTRAGES.

5. THE APPARENT KIDNAPPING OF THE CONSTABLE POSED THE
QUESTION WHETHER PIRA HAD DECIDED TO BEGIN USING THAT
TACTIC. THE IMPLICATIONS WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE. PIRA
HAS KIDNAPPED RARELY, AND THE LAST ONE IN NORTHERN
IRELAND WAS IN THE EARLY 1970S. BECAUSE OF THE
AMBIGUOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, THE QUICK ADMISSION OF KILLING,
AND THE DIFFICULTIES OF HANDLING THE KIDNAPPED, WE
CONSIDER IT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT.

6. FATHER MURPHY PROBABLY WAS TAKEN BY LOYALISTS (THE
UFF, A SIMILAR EXTREME GROUP, OR UNAFFILIATED INDIVI-
DUALS), ALTHOUGH THERE IS SPECULATION THAT PIRA DID IT
AS A PROVOCATION. PRESUMABLY THE SHARP PUBLIC REACTION
AND PAISLEY'S VIGOROUS STATEMENT SHOWED THE LOYALISTS
THEIR ERROR. FATHER MURPHY'S PARISH IS IN HEAVILY
PROTESTANT TERRITORY. IN SEEMING PARADOX, HE IS KNOWN
AS ONE OF THE FEW PRIESTS IN NI WHO IS PUBLICLY LOYAL
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TO THE QUEEN. HE WAS A ROYAL NAVY CHAPLAIN AND PARTI-
CIPATES IN PATRIOTIC CEREMONIES. EXTREME LOYALISTS
WOULD CONSIDER HIM PRESUMPTIOUS. END COMMENT.

7. ADDENDUM JUNE 21: SECURITY FORCES SCORED A MAJOR
SUCCESS LATE LAST NIGHT WHEN THEY STAKED OUT A POST
OFFICE IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST OUTSIDE THE SECURITY BARRIER.
ACCORDING TO EARLY REPORTS, SOLDIERS KILLED FOUR MEN
AND WOUNDED ANOTHER, AND RECOVERED SEVERAL BLAST-
INCENDIARY BOMBS. UNFORTUNATELY, APPARENTLY ONE OF THE
MEN KILLED AND THE ONE WOUNDED WERE PASSERS-BY.
BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF THE OPERATION AND THE HARM TO
INNOCENTS, THERE IS BOUND TO BE CONSIDERABLE CRITICISM
OF THE ARMY FROM REPUBLICANS. FOR THE TERRORISTS,
HOWEVER, SUCH A DEFEAT IS A MAJOR BLOW: IT PRESUMABLY
MEANS THE SECURITY FORCES WERE OPERATING ON THE BASIS
OF INFORMATION SUPPLIED FROM INSIDE, AND NOTHING IS
MORE DEVASTATING FOR THOSE PENETRATED.

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